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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 001572

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KDEM SOCI AJ

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: INDEPENDENT YOUTH MOVEMENT LEADER
DETAINED, PROTEST FOILED

Classified By: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION JOAN POLASCHIK PER 1.4(B,
D)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: On October 16 the Baku Mayor's Office denied an application to hold a protest rally from the independent youth movement Yox, stating that a rally was "not advisable." The leader of Yox, Ali Ismayilov, announced his plans to carry on with the protest, and was subsequently detained twice during the evening of October 17 and the early morning of October 18. After his initial detention, Ismayilov was forced from his home and interrogated for hours by unidentified men who demanded that he admit his alliance to prominent opposition leader Ali Kerimli. He was released one hour after the start of the would-be protest, with the threat that if he "kept it up" or told anyone what had happened, he would be "worse off than Ruslan (Bashirli)," the leader of the Yeni Fikir youth movement who was convicted of attempting a coup d'tat. Since Ismayilov was able to contact his brother after his initial detention, members of the Yox movement were warned and did not gather for the protest. This is the latest in a series of GOAJ actions against freedom of assembly; we will provide a full analytical report septel.

END SUMMARY

ISMAYILOV'S INITIAL DETENTION...

¶12. (C) On October 16 the Baku Mayor's Office denied a protest application from the independent youth movement Yox, informing Yox that such a protest "was not advisable." Yox - which means "no" in English - is an independent youth organization with approximately 200 active members throughout the country. Yox is often speculated to be a pro-opposition organization because of its membership in the Youth Coalition, which is comprised mainly of pro-opposition parties and NGOs, but Yox's leadership insists that the movement is independent and not linked to any party. The movement's leader, Ali Ismayilov, had previously told the press on October 3 that he would move forward with the protest even if it were unsanctioned. Ismayilov confirmed this on October 13, and told Poloff that in any event, Yox members would behave in a peaceful manner.

¶13. (C) The protest had been planned for October 18, and was intended to protest the current media freedom situation, corruption, and the abuse of power in Azerbaijan. Ismayilov expected between 100 and 500 youth to attend. (Note: Since Yox only has 200 active members nationwide, it is unlikely that the protest would have garnered a higher turnout, although another small youth organization, the Young Turks, planned to join the protest.) On the evening of October 17, Ismayilov, who reportedly had been followed, was picked up by uniformed police in front of a metro station at approximately ¶1900. Although he was not charged with any crime, he was detained in a police station for about one hour, and forced to sign a document stating that he had been "warned" and would be held personally responsible for anything that

occurred the next day as a result of the protest. After Ismayilov signed the document, he was released.

...FOLLOWED BY A SECOND

¶ 14. (C) Ismayilov reported that shortly after midnight on the morning of October 18, four unidentified men entered his residence. He said that he was subsequently hooded, forced into a vehicle, and taken to an apartment where he was interrogated for hours. Ismayilov speculated to Poloff that these men - who never identified themselves - were not regular police officers. He said that although he was kicked and had water splashed on him if he tried to sleep, the pressure these men exerted on him was psychological rather than physical, through the nature of their questioning rather than through physical violence. Ismayilov's interrogators outlined everything he had done that day, as well as the detailed activities of his fiance. According to Ismayilov, the interrogators demanded that he admit his alliance to Ali Kerimli, the leader of the prominent opposition Azadliq bloc.

THE YENI FIKIR THREAT

¶ 15. (C) Ismayilov told Poloff that the interrogators persisted in asking him why he was planning such a rally when the country was "clearly in a stable situation." According to Ismayilov, they also told him that the opposition would be allowed to hold protests closer to the upcoming 2008 Presidential Elections. His interrogation lasted throughout the night, and he was released one hour after the start of the would-be protest. Ismayilov told Poloff that prior to releasing him, the interrogators issued the threat that if he

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"kept it up" or told anyone what had happened he would be "worse off than Ruslan." (Note: This refers to the case of Ruslan Bashirli, the jailed leader of the Yeni Fikir youth movement who was convicted with two others on charges of attempting a coup d'tat in August 2005.)

POLICE RESPONSE TO THE WOULD-BE PROTEST

¶ 16. (C) After his initial detention, Ismayilov had contacted the Embassy, several members of the media, and his brother, so word quickly spread when he could not be located during the second detention. Ismayilov's brother warned Yox members not to gather at the designated spot unless Ismayilov was released prior to the start of the protest, which did not happen. Poloff visited the site of the would-be protest at the specified starting time, and observed more than 100 uniformed police officers and dozens of suspected plainclothes police officers, as well as several local police chiefs and two buses ostensibly waiting to take detainees to the police station.

DETENTION CREATES CHILLING EFFECT

¶ 17. (C) Ismayilov told Poloff that because his employer had been contacted by both the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of National Security, he expects to lose his job as a public schoolteacher. He said that the detentions also prompted him to rethink Yox's future activities, explaining that he fears similar negative repercussions for Yox's 200 members. He also said that on some level, he was relieved that the protest did not take place, because he feared that the police reaction could have been brutal and he did not want to see Yox's members harmed.

COMMENT

¶ 18. (C) The government's denial of Yox's application to hold a

protest rally is the latest in a long string of denials. Since GOAJ police forces violently disbursed an authorized opposition political rally on November 26, 2005, the GOAJ has routinely denied authorization for opposition or independent groups to hold rallies, often providing little reason for the denial. This represents a disturbing trend of restrictions of freedom of assembly; we will provide a full analytical report septel.

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